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British ex-counterspy named as mole

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LONDON — A former chief of Britain's counterintelligence service was accused Monday of having been a "long-term Soviet penetration agent."

The charge was made in a television documentary by Peter Wright, a retired officer of the service. Wright said that it was "99 percent certain" that Sir Roger Hollis, who headed the service, known as MI-5, from 1956 to 1965 and who died in 1973, was a spy for the Soviet Union.

For years, many investigators believed that there was a deep penetration agent, a so-called mole, inside the service. In 1981, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher told the House of Commons that Hollis had been investigated and cleared.

Thatcher made her statement in response to charges by journalist Chapman Pincher in his book, *Their Trade is Treachery*.

Pincher said the Oxford-educated Hollis spied for the Soviets over nearly 30 years, "during which he stood either near or at the top" of British intelligence. He was interrogated after his retirement but "never cracked," Pincher said.

Pincher's main allegation was that Hollis was the "fifth man" in a spy ring headed by Anthony Blunt, a top intelligence official and later art adviser to Queen Elizabeth II. Blunt confessed in 1963 and was publicly unmasked in 1979.

Blunt admitted recruiting three other men while he was a professor at Cambridge University — Guy Burgess, a British agent in Washington who defected to Moscow in 1951; Donald Maclean, a high-level MI-5 operative who also defected in 1951, and Kim Philby, who fled to Moscow from his post in Beirut in 1963 after being warned that he had been found out.

Another retired British spy, Leo Long, now a film company executive, confessed in 1981 to being the ring's "fourth man."

Wright said Monday that Thatcher had been "advised by the security service who were anxious that there wouldn't be a high-level independent inquiry into the service that might drag skeletons out of the cupboard that they would not want revealed."

Wright said that he was breaking the silence that all agents are required to observe because he wished to get the facts before the public in the hope that the government would tighten up security procedures.

His disclosure, if true, would mean that Hollis, throughout his 28-year government career, most of it in highly sensitive positions, was able to pass on to the Soviets the most delicate secrets of the British security apparatus.

MI-5 is responsible for counterintelligence operations and internal security. Another agency, MI-6, is responsible for gathering intelligence abroad. U.S. intelligence officials have long suspected that the British security services were deeply penetrated by the Soviets in the postwar period.

In that period, Hollis was director general of MI-5. The investigation of his activities produced evidence that was viewed as inconclusive by some but damaging by others.

"It was all circumstantial," Wright said Monday on the television program.

Wright insisted, however, that Hollis was not cleared. There was just not enough evidence to convict him in a court of law, he said.

After Hollis retired, Wright conducted another investigation, which according to Wright concluded that there was still an undiscovered spy with access to major secrets.

In her defense of Hollis in 1981, Thatcher said the investigation showed that any espionage links could be traced to Philby and Blunt. But Wright insisted Monday that "to say that it could all be explained by Philby and Blunt was rubbish." He said that his investigation pointed clearly to Hollis.

Just before Hollis retired in 1965, Wright said, Hollis called him into his office and asked, "Why do you think I'm a spy?"

"I gave him a summary of [Wright's investigation] and pointed out that he was by far the best suspect," Wright recalled. "His reply to that was, 'Peter, you have got the manacles on me.' He said: 'I can only tell you that I am not a spy.' And I shrugged my shoulders and that was that."

After Hollis retired, he was called back again for additional questioning by another investigating committee in 1970. According to Wright, Hollis was not able to explain to this group his activities during a two-year period after he graduated from Oxford and before he joined the service in the late 1930s.

Wright said that Hollis had the chance then to clear himself beyond doubt, but did not do so.

Later, still another investigation into the possibility of a highly placed mole was launched under the direction of Lord Trent, a former head of the civil service. It concluded that Hollis had not been a spy, and these findings were cited by the prime minister before Parliament in 1981.

Wright said that he and other investigators did not agree with Lord Trent's conclusion.

"I don't think he realized that in intelligence cases you very seldom got smoking-gun evidence," Wright said.

Wright also said that the late Sir Dennis Proctor, a former permanent secretary to the Ministry of Fuel and Power, made a "partial confession" when he was interviewed in retirement in France, saying that he had been a Communist in the 1930s and passed government information to Burgess.

In a related development, a High Court judge ruled Monday that the Conservative government's Jan. 25 ban on labor unions at a secret intelligence-gathering center was unlawful and violated "natural justice."

He held that the government had a right to ban unions at the center, but only after consulting the staff.

Jubilant civil service unions claimed a "historic victory" and immediately started re-recruiting intelligence staff at the Government Communications Headquarters in Cheltenham, 190 miles from London in southwest England.

London commentators speculated that the decision by London High Court Judge Iain Glidewell could lead to reluctance on the part of the United States to share some sensitive intelligence with Britain.

This report was supplemented with material from The Associated Press.

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